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SUBJECT: MEDVEDEV CAPITALIZES ON MOSCOW POLICE FORCE
SACKINGS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: An April 27 police shooting spree that was captured on video and placed on the internet rocked Moscow and gave President Medvedev an opportunity to burnish his anti-corruption credentials. In sacking Moscow police chief Vladimir Pronin and four other high-level police officials, Medvedev got political mileage over Moscow Mayor Luzhkov's failure to hold the police leadership accountable. However, the President is still under pressure to prove that his liberal gestures will amount to a fundamental course correction. End Summary.

Bloodbath Rocks Moscow to the Core

¶2. (SBU) On April 27, police Major Denis Yevsyukov, the head of the Tsaritsino police precinct in southern Moscow, wrapped up a drinkfest by shooting dead a cab driver using a pistol reported missing and then walking into a supermarket where he shot eight more people, killing two. A video from the store's closed-circuit cameras of Yevsyukov calmly walking down the grocery store aisles shooting at shoppers played on all major Russian television stations and was posted on the internet. On May 5, a Moscow court charged Yevsyukov with murder, attempted murder, and possession of an illegal firearm.

¶3. (SBU) The Yevsyukov episode hit a nerve with Muscovites, frustrated by the rampant corruption in the police force. The daily Izvestiya reported on May 8 that Yevsyukov paid USD 25,000 to get his current position and extorted money from local establishments to maintain his sinecure. Izvestiya also reported that Yevsyukov used a gun that the police took from detained Chechens to commit his crime. According to Colonel Chernousov, former Moscow police official and now defense attorney at the human rights organization "For Human Rights," Yevsyukov's alleged drinking problem was not the main problem; as a policeman he was simply used to acting above the law. According to Novaya Gazeta, 30 percent of the Moscow police force have psychological problems and almost half of the policemen suffer from alcoholism. Pronin was the third Moscow police chief in a row that the Kremlin fired, which presented a staffing problem for Luzhkov. Lev Ponomarev, leader of For Human Rights, told us that the law enforcement system remains in a state of crisis: "people can buy any position in Russia--every position needs to be bought."

¶4. (SBU) While the Interior Ministry pledged to provide support and assistance to the victims and their families and to conduct inspections in Moscow police departments, there was no immediate move to hold MVD officials responsible for Yevsyukov's actions. According to our contacts, Luzhkov and Moscow Police Chief Pronin were close allies. Pronin was known for doing Luzhkov's dirty work in Moscow, cracking down on gay parades and other "disturbances." According to media reports, Pronin skirted dismissal in the past. Vladimir

Putin appointed him to the post in 2001, but Pronin submitted his resignation in 2002 after a football fan riot killed two people and injured 72. However, Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev would not accept Pronin's voluntary resignation. Pronin came under fire again that year for not preventing Chechen terrorists from seizing the Dubrovka theater. Nevertheless, he managed to win work-related awards as recently as 2008, and remained Luzhkov's close ally. Unconfirmed reports surfaced that Pronin may have offered to resign this time as well.

Medvedev Seizes Opening to Put a Bite on Corruption

¶5. (SBU) On April 28, Medvedev circumvented Luzhkov and intervened directly to sack Pronin as part of his reinvigorated "anti-corruption" drive. In addition to Pronin, Medvedev fired the head of Moscow's southern police district Viktor Ageyev, and three of Ageyev's deputies. (On May 12, Izvestiya reported that the Tsaritsino police station was missing 13 weapons and that one of the sacked deputies, Alexey Safonov, had been trading arms.) Luzhkov was caught flat-footed during a local T.V. interview when he expressed his dismay over Pronin's dismissal and praised his work during a live television interview on April 28. According to the Moscow Times on May 5, City Hall now faces a lawsuit over the cop's rampage and the victims will seek compensation.

Political Pointscoring, but Little Reform

¶6. (SBU) According to Ponomarev, Pronin's firing will not

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solve the many problems that permeate the Moscow law-enforcement system. A real solution, he told us, required a complete overhaul of the police force. Ponomarev said that Pronin was not the worst Moscow police chief, since he was "friendly" and maintained some contact with human rights organizations. While Ponomarev argued that Medvedev was serious about anti-corruption, he acknowledged the need for tangible results. In his view, sacking these five individuals was a good step, if only a small one.

¶7. (SBU) The former St. Petersburg Police Chief Mikhail Vanichkin tipped to be the new police chief of Moscow has been characterized by the press as a compromise figure acceptable to Medvedev, Putin, and Luzhkov. According to press reports, Vanichkin has a reputation for being tough on crime and is well-connected with politicians in both St. Petersburg and Moscow. Kommersant reported on May 12 that St. Petersburg Governor Valentina Matviyenko, who is close to Putin, personally lobbied for his appointment.

Comment

¶8. (SBU) Medvedev's move to hold the Moscow police chief accountable played well among the public and provided a political boost. However, absent fundamental law enforcement reform and implementation of existing anti-corruption legislation, cynicism will mount, with the President under pressure to show that his liberal gestures will translate into a new policy direction.

BEYRLE